

'Greed is good'

*an extract from „The good, bad and ugly of Indian life - all on one road“ a BBC 4 report on India
by correspondent Chris Morris*

India still talks proudly about its Gandhian heritage. Parliamentarians were delighted when Barack Obama addressed them in Delhi, and told them he might not have been standing where he was if it had not been for Gandhi's inspiring example.

5 But for years now, with some notable exceptions, Gandhian values have all but disappeared from Indian public life. For most of the time in modern India, greed is good. Maybe they are just reverting to type. Indians love to trade, Hindu festivals are often celebrations of wealth and prosperity, and this is a country which needs to get richer to help the poor.

10 But when the head of the government's main anti-fraud body retired last year he made an extraordinary statement. One in three Indians, Pratyush Sinha estimated, is utterly corrupt. And a majority of the rest are right on the borderline. "When we were growing up," he said, "if somebody was corrupt, they were generally looked down upon. There was at least some social stigma attached to it. "That's gone now. There's greater social acceptance." " When the BBC commissioned an opinion poll which came out in December, corruption and greed emerged as the most widely discussed problems in India "

15 By and large I think he is right, which is why I was taken by surprise during my last few months in Delhi by the sudden intensity of focus on corruption in high places. Cabinet ministers, wealthy businessmen, members of the armed forces, and politically well-connected organisers of the Commonwealth Games, all of them came under the microscope. The media were having a field day. India's excitable 24-hour news channels were breaking so much news that I thought
20 they might burst. One day my morning paper ran five different major corruption stories on its first eight pages. Nothing else got a look in.

So it was not too unexpected that when the BBC commissioned an opinion poll which came out in December, corruption and greed emerged as the most widely discussed problems in India. Yes, even more than losing a game of cricket. My more cynical friends were distinctly
25 unimpressed. They assured me it would all be taken care of in the usual way - a couple of scapegoats, a commission of inquiry lasting 20 years, and snouts back in the trough. Even the doyen of Indian business, Ratan Tata, the owner of Mumbai's famous Taj hotel and the man who brought us the Nano, the world's cheapest car, has spoken of the dangers of a "banana republic" mentality emerging, with crony capitalism ruling the roost.

30 The government said it would get to the bottom of it all. The opposition stalled parliamentary business for weeks - shouting down speaker after speaker - in order to embarrass the government. And the record shows that nearly a third of all members of parliament are facing criminal charges, many of them for corruption.

Dowry wars: The big issue that has India divided

Men say their rights are violated by a law that protects brides.

By Andrew Buncombe, Wednesday, 2 March 2011, Source: Independent.co.uk

An intense lobbying battle is being fought as the Indian government prepares to amend landmark legislation introduced nearly three decades ago to protect women who were being attacked, harassed and even murdered for refusing to pay dowries. Amid an increasingly vocal campaign by "men's rights" organisations, who claim the law has been misused in order to extort money from husbands, the government has asked its legal advisers to investigate and suggest options for reform.

Women's groups say the legislation is vital to protect countless numbers of brides against violent demands for dowries and must not be watered down. They claim that up to 25,000 Indian women are killed every year because of the inability or refusal of their families to make such payments to the family of grooms. The payment of dowries was banned in India in 1961 but remains commonplace and may be on the rise. In 1983, Section 498a of the Indian penal code was introduced to offer additional protection to women, by ruling that any husband or member of his family convicted of "cruelty" or violence associated with attempting to force such payments should face up to three years in jail. [...]

The campaign to scrap Section 498a is being led by groups including the Save the Family Foundation. An official, Niladri Das, claimed men in India were increasingly resentful of "biased" laws. He said that more than 95 per cent of men charged under 498a were later acquitted and that was proof the law was being misused. "A woman can make any accusation she wants," he said. He said claims that 25,000 women a year were killed was "a lie propagated by feminists in order to get money from international NGOs". He added: "We are not saying there are no cases, but these figures are highly inflated."

Women's rights campaigners say any dilution of the act would be a big mistake. They argue that women face widespread sexual and physical abuse in India and say that if a law is being misused, then the police and courts need to act more efficiently rather than change it. They also argue that the continued practice of dowry payments in the country, and the attendant preference for male children, has helped contribute to the widespread abortion of female fetuses. The problem is so prevalent that in some parts of India there is a marked gender imbalance. A 2001 census found that in Punjab for every 1,000 boys there were only 793 girls.

Among those urging the authorities to retain the law is Girender Singh, from Delhi. His 24-year-old daughter Anshu was found dead in January last year, just 45 days after she was married. Mr Singh said Anshu's husband's family had repeatedly made demands for money and while he did not pay a formal dowry, he handed over around £6,000. His daughter's husband was arrested on a charge of murder and the case is before the courts.

Mr Singh declined to talk about Anshu's case but instead forwarded a copy of a letter he had sent to the authorities in which he expressed his "pain and agony" and asked they not dilute the legislation. "In truth, is there any law to save girls and married women in India except 498a?" he wrote. "A little fear of 498a might save the girls and women from heinous crimes which are on a rising trend in our great Indian society."

Is India poor?

Source: Guardian Weekly, Friday 24 November 2006 15.08 GMT

Is India poor? To western eyes, unaccustomed to ragged children begging and handless stumps at car windows, the answer is obvious. But to many Indians the question appears absurd and insulting.

Instead of focusing on abounding poverty, the country appears entranced by newspaper headlines that extol record stock market highs, record mobile phone sales and record car production figures. Little wonder that one columnist was outraged that a guest on Oprah had described Delhi as "one of the poorest places on the earth". But the celebrity, not the irate columnist, was right. The average income in Delhi is about 54,000 Indian rupees (\$1,200). Although this is more than double the national average, it is no fortune.

Even worse, the latest World Bank review on India reports that on average only half the teaching staff at government schools bother to turn up every day. In Delhi, the nation's capital, doctors in state-run surgeries are less qualified than their counterparts in Tanzania. There is no doubt that India's boom is real. There are plenty of signs that wealth is trickling down. Bigger cars, electronics shops and smooth roads are all signs of a spending spree of the kind never seen before in modern India. The biggest companies talk of hiring 40,000 people in a year; investments by the private sector in new projects rose by 60% last year. Surjit Bhalla, a noted economist, has claimed that India is approaching a Chinese-sized spurt, with the economy heading for 10% growth.

Growth is a good thing. Pauperising a country means there is no money for education and health. But there are worrying signs. While incomes are going up, public cash is not percolating down: the government cannot seem to funnel wealth generation into human development. The incapacity of the state is shown in the erosion of its ability to deliver services such as public safety, education and health. Little wonder India has thriving private security firms, schools and hospitals. The private sector has filled the gap left by crumbling public services. Students cram into private colleges to get into university while poor children passing through government schools cannot read or write. Foreigners jet in for tummy tucks and heart bypasses as public hospitals run out of blood and beds.

The problem is not a cultural one, to be talked away by references to Indian exceptionalism. Indexes of government performance should show improvement during bouts of economic prosperity. But the UN shows human development in India slowing from 1990 to 2004.

For Indians there are greater opportunities to become rich. There are dazzling heights to scale, such as sending an Indian into space. But the country's rise will not also lift its people out of poverty unless there is serious reform of the way government acts and thinks.

The problem with crime against women in Delhi

Why is Delhi India's most dangerous city for women? Chaotic growth, bad policing and a judicial system close to collapse

Jason Burke, The Guardian, Tuesday 22 February 2011

Delhi is known for many things. There is the chaotic traffic, the stunning Mughal-era monuments, the street food, the burgeoning cultural scene that sees a steady stream of European designers and artists heading east in search of inspiration. There is poverty, of course, and the hubris that is the right of every emerging power. And then there is an element that, at least in the west, is less often heard about: the endemic sexual violence. [...]

"The dazzling streets of Delhi hide a dark truth," it said, publishing the results of a poll revealing that 66% of the capital's women were molested between two and five times last year and that 70% of men "looked the other way" when it happened. What happens when they don't was amply demonstrated last Thursday when a 55-year-old rickshaw driver in West Delhi was beaten to death for "defending his daughter's modesty" from a group of drunks. [...] According to the Indian government's 2009 Crime in India report, Delhi is by far India's most unsafe major metropolis for women and children. Though it accounted for only 13.2% of all crimes committed in 35 "mega cities" across India in 2009, nearly 24% of total rape cases and almost 40% of cases of reported kidnapping and abduction of women were committed here. Campaigners now want to know why.

One answer lies in the very nature of this fragmented, incoherent city. Over the past thousand years the centre of Delhi has been displaced nearly a dozen times. In recent decades, there has been almost no planning of its extraordinary, exponential growth. The result is a mess, insufficiently uniform to be a labyrinth, too varied to be described as an "urban jungle". Instead, Delhi is a series of independent clusters – of families, of trades, of communities, of wealth and poverty – split by major roads that are impossible to cross due to their chaotic traffic. According to Ranjana Kumari, director of Delhi's Centre for Social Research, only 37% of the city was ever planned. "The rest is . . . slums, villages, with no proper lighting or development," she said last week. "There are many pockets of crime." [...]

A final factor is the manifest failures of the police. The Delhi policeman is a figure of legend, renowned for sloth, corruption, brutality and casual misogyny. A constable is classed as semi-skilled labour on government pay scales. Almost all the many dark detective novels set in northern India published in the last year or so have featured scenes of torture, humiliation, venality or simple incompetence set in the local thana, or police station. Most are based on true stories.

What the ever-present sense of threat means for many young women in Delhi, however, is obvious. Out on a rubble-strewn pavement at a crossroads on the Delhi ring road last night, as the dusk closed in at around seven o'clock, Nisha and Shivalani were waiting for a bus. Both worked in the nearby office of a rice dealer. Both were heading home. More than half of incidents of sexual assault or harassment take place on public transport, a recent survey found. The two women stood close together and caught no one's eye. "I like Delhi during the day. I like people here," said Nisha, 24. "But not so much at night."

A disunited nation wracked by turmoil

India has been racked by ethnic and religious conflict since independence from Britain in 1947.

By Roshan Muhammed Salih, August 2003, Source: Aljazeera..net

India has been racked by ethnic and religious conflict since independence from Britain in 1947. The world's largest secular democracy is predicted to be one of the political, economic and military superpowers of the 21st century. But it is also a place where thousands have been slaughtered in regular outbreaks of religious turmoil. [...]

- 5 Mumbai itself was the scene of bloody Hindu-Muslim riots following the 1992 demolition of the ancient Babri mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya. The financial heart of India was also rocked by a string of bombings in 1993 which left at least 300 people dead. Hindus and Muslims are still disputing whether ruins found at India's most controversial religious site are evidence of a Hindu temple.

The differences follow the release of a report compiled by a team of Indian Government archaeologists
- 10 excavating at Ayodhya. The report says there is "archaeological evidence of a massive structure" below ground where the Babri mosque was demolished 11 years ago. Hindu groups have expressed pleasure at the report's findings and say it will strengthen their case to have a Hindu temple built at the site. But Muslims say the report offers no proof the building was meant for Hindu worship, and have accused the archeologists of working under pressure from the hardline Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party.
- 15 The Ayodhya riots, which left 2000 people dead, were the precursor to a religious conflagration in Gujarat last year. Riots broke out in February 2002 after 60 Hindu pilgrims were burned to death on a train. About 2000 people died in the ensuing reprisals against Muslims, along with mass rapes of hundreds of women. First reports alleged the train torching was carried out by a Muslim mob, but a subsequent report by forensic scientists proved inconclusive.
- 20 Respected human rights groups blamed the Hindu nationalist state government of Gujarat for orchestrating the violence. Mumbai has also seen a spate of deadly bombings this year. Last month four people were killed in a bombing during rush hour, and in March a bomb planted on a suburban train killed 11 people.

Indian authorities were quick to point the finger for the attacks at Pakistani resistance group Lashker-e-
- 25 Taiba. Lashker is one of the two groups New Delhi blames for the December 2001 attack on its parliament which left 15 people dead. The organisation is fighting to remove Indian forces from the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir. The territory of Kashmir was hotly contested even before India and Pakistan won their independence from Britain in August 1947. Since then it has been the flashpoint for two of the three India-Pakistan wars - the first in 1947-8, the second in 1965.
- 30 And in 1999, India fought a brief but bitter conflict with Pakistani-backed forces who had infiltrated Indian-controlled territory in the Kargil area. It is still too early to say for sure who is responsible for Monday's Mumbai blasts. It is also uncertain why India's financial capital has been targeted. But one thing is sure – the grievances which led the bombers to kill are plentiful and they are not going to go away soon.